

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Influence of St. Benedict Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time Monday, July 11, 2016
8:15 AM Is 1:10-17; Mt 10 34—11:1 (**St. Benedict**, abbot) (A greater balance between the inner and outer, a greater sense of who we are as people focused on the common good and the common life of the community, and a general sense of the value of the spirit and the qualities of spirit in learning and the arts.)

Today we are celebrating the memorial of St. Benedict. **St. Benedict had an enormous influence on the development of life in society and the culture of Europe.** He did this through the **founding of a monastic chain or system.**

Now when Benedict came to the ideal of monasteries there were already groups, communities, dedicated to what you could call the pursuit of perfection or contemplation; however, he found it unbalanced. Most so-called monasteries or **hermitages were focused on external ascetical practices**; you could say they were Christian forms of Buddhism or Yoga. Benedict found this unbalanced because like Jesus himself **he saw the absolute importance of the inner life**, the consciousness of who we are in God, who we are through Christ, who we are in the Holy Spirit. So just as Jesus was always trying to move from conformity to conscience, from external law to inner conviction, so Benedict tried to move from ascetic practice to some sort of **inner awareness as the center of monastic life, which leads to the growth of humility and obedience**, because if we understand who we are in Christ, members of his body, we can have nothing but humility, **understanding ourselves then as part of something much greater, therefore incapable of being self-centered.** And of course this calls forth obedience to the whole, **submission to the head who is Christ.** And this is the ideal of Benedictine life or monastic life in the order of St. Benedict.

This also transforms the community itself because as people become humble and obedient to the larger picture, they start to really grow in community, and the common life itself becomes the project. And by doing this successfully, Benedictine monasteries and their, you might say,

allies: the Cistercians, the Trappists, various other groups based again on St. Benedict, **transformed the life of Europe from a barbarian culture of violence to civilization** where learning became a prime purpose, where letters and thought and music became valued occupations.

So Benedict transformed the face of Europe and it is for this reason that we need to honor his memory. But **we honor people's memory when we inculcate in ourselves their gifts and their values.** And surely modern Europe and the West in general could learn again from the teachings of St. Benedict to achieve **a greater balance between the inner and outer, a greater sense of who we are as people,** not each of us on some personal, individual trajectory but, rather, all of us together living in one body focused on the common good and **the common life of the community,** and a general sense of the **value of the spirit and the qualities of spirit** as they can become elaborated in literature, music, art, medicine, and various fields. So Benedict was a person of renewal and he is still an example of what we need to do, adapted of course to our own time and place.